# What to Consider When Renovating a Foodservice Kitchen

*By Doug Fahrenholz*

**A successful kitchen renovation begins with thorough planning. Here are tips to lead you to – and carry you through – an effective kitchen remodel.**

When considering the renovation of a foodservice kitchen, begin by asking, *"Who are we and what are we?"* Answering the following questions will help determine your direction during a renovation project:

- Are we customer driven?
- Must we keep up with today's trends?
- Must we change for tomorrow?
- Are we a profit center?
- Are we a restaurant to our customers?
- Do we set the daily tone and mood of each customer by our food offerings?

If you answered "yes" to all of the above, you are ready to tackle the task of examining your current kitchen operation and begin planning for what it can become in the future.

As you start the process of kitchen renovation, focus on:

- The scope of service requirements for future customers
- Creating an efficient design
- Reducing labor

## The Scope of Service Requirements for Future Customers

The people that become your residents in 15 years may not eat the foods you currently provide. The foods we enjoy today during our daily routine are what we expect to eat someday as a long-term care customer. Residents will want to choose what they eat for each meal. Menu selection will be the trend as baby boomers age and use dietary services. The scope will be table service and not tray service, requiring staff to serve food. Residents will want to be waited on as if dining in a full-service restaurant. Essentially, they will want "just-in-time meals" – food prepared to order. Customers will also expect:

- Attractive, comfortable dining rooms
- Attentive staff to deliver tableside service
- Catering and banquet facilities for family social events

## Creating an Efficient Design

When designing efficiency into the renovation process, it is imperative to consider the open kitchen concept. This means knocking down kitchen walls to gain additional space for your operations. Open kitchens make it easier to manage foodservice staff. All kitchen equipment should be on casters for mobility purposes except for any plumbing fixtures. Design a smooth and logical flow from receiving to finished product. Consider the following:

- Delivery area
- Cold/dry storage
- Prep area
- Warewashing
- Plating/serving area
- Service staff area

## Reducing Labor

When planning a new kitchen, strive to reduce one full-time person per shift or a minimum of 80 hours per week. The estimated savings per year is $60,000. Focus on implementing new kitchen technology to reduce labor and speed up the food preparation process. Learn about the latest labor-saving kitchen equipment for preparing your menu items. Also consider the process for already-prepared foods. This process is known as "heat and serve." Many hospitality and healthcare facilities are already using "heat and serve" for their daily menu selections. Consult with your food distributor about products currently available that meet your dietary needs. Another consideration is a healthcare facility that is grouped with other healthcare facilities under one common ownership to explore commissary planning or group purchasing and preparation under one roof. This would entail meals for multiple locations be prepared and trucked to individual facilities for heating and plating.

Consider implementing a cook-chill program in your kitchen renovation project. Cook-chill enables you to purchase bulk food products and prepare/cook menu items in advance with extended refrigeration expiration dates.

## From Idea to Reality

The steps in remodeling a kitchen consist of:

- The information-gathering process
- The decision-making process
- The renovation start date
- The renovation completion date

## The Information-Gathering Process

Depending on the project, begin your planning 12 months before the anticipated project completion date. (See sample timeline in sidebar.) When gathering information, involve these people in the planning process:

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- Kitchen designer – consultant
- Facility administrator
- Dietary staff
- In-house maintenance – engineering
- Architect

Review other kitchen facilities to understand different dietary applications. List the top 10 reasons for renovating your current kitchen. Prepare a budget of what you can afford to spend on your renovation. Understand the current mechanical layout of your kitchen, such as:

- Floor drains
- Electric
- Gas – BTUs
- Hood ventilation

Put together a plan during the construction process on how many days the kitchen will be inoperable. Will the construction be in phases? How will you feed residents during the construction process? Get the local health department representative involved and seek input on your renovation. Some applications might be grandfathered due to the age of your facility, but they may not be grandfathered for a remodel project. Follow ADA codes if major construction is in your plans. ADA codes to consider are restroom accessibility and door widths. Have two-dimensional drawings of your current kitchen layout and the proposed new layout.

Have a foodservice equipment distributor prepare an equipment budget for the remodel process. The final stage in the gathering process is to interview and receive construction quotes from general contractors.

## The Decision-Making Process

In the decision-making phase, list and analyze the cost of each service to determine your total pricetag (see example in sidebar). Services and costs to consider include:

- Architect cost
- Kitchen designer cost
- Kitchen equipment cost
- General contractor cost
- Down-time cost

Prepare a proposal and review the cost and savings with your administrator. Proposal and discussion should cover:

- Reduced staff savings annually
- Reduced preparation time savings annually
- Reduced energy savings annually
- Reduced food cost savings annually
- Total project cost

Tally all annual savings and divide by the total cost of the renovation to give you the payoff timetable. *Example:* A $216,000 project with an estimated $100,000 annual savings

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## 52-Week Kitchen Renovation Schedule

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| Week 1 | Explore kitchen remodel with completion in 52 weeks |
| Week 2 | Meet with dietary staff to discuss budget ideas |
| Week 3 | Meet with facility administrator to discuss ideas and savings |
| Week 4 | Contact kitchen designer and architect for discussion |
| Week 5 | Discuss renovation with other association members to gain ideas |
| Week 6 | Prepare a list of what you want – plan |
| Week 7 | Contact local health department for involvement |
| Week 8 | Start kitchen design layout |
| Weeks 9-10 | Kitchen designer processes layout |
| Week 11 | Get architect started on mechanical layouts |
| Weeks 12-13 | Architect processes layout |
| Week 14 | Start the general contractor interviewing process |
| Week 15 | Architect complete with drawings and scope of work along with kitchen equipment costs |
| Week 16 | Have several general contractors quote project/ have kitchen suppliers quote equipment |
| Week 17 | Consolidate all costs and prepare a proposal showing savings |
| Week 18 | Meet with administrator and review proposal |
| Weeks 19-26 | Wait for administrator/board approval |
| Week 27 | Gain approval to move forward – Meet as a group with architect, kitchen provider, general contractor |
| Week 28 | Sign contracts with parties to start project |
| Week 29 | Meet with architect, kitchen provider, and general contractor as project kicks-off |
| Weeks 30-34 | General contractor hires trades |
| Weeks 36-43 | Construction underway |
| Week 44 | Equipment delivered to project – construction |
| Week 45 | General contractor completes – equipment installation complete |
| Weeks 46-47 | Buffer |
| Week 48 | New kitchen completed and operating |
| Week 49 | Work kinks out of new kitchen |
| Week 50 | Have punch list meeting with architect, kitchen provider, general contractor |
| Week 51 | Punch list in process |
| **Week 52** | **Punch list completed** |
| Weeks 53-77 | Use new kitchen |
| Week 78 | Have six-month punch list walk-through with architect, kitchen provider, general contractor |

# An Architect's Views on Foodservice Design Architecture

The architect you've just hired comes highly recommended. Yet after your last conversation, you get the feeling he isn't listening to you. Maybe he talks a lot about design and shows little interest in your facility's equipment and work flow needs. Should you be concerned? Absolutely, says Steve Vasilion, AIA, owner of Vasilion Architects in Batavia, Ill.

DMA staff writer Laura Vasilion interviewed her husband Steve to learn how to get the most from an architect and what to expect from the client-architect relationship. Following are his insights.

*When it comes to health care in general and foodservice design specifically, a lot of architects shy away from these kinds of projects. First of all, they aren't very glamourous. Secondly, the demands technically on these projects are quite specific. They are often perceived as projects that exact a great deal from an architect in terms of technical requirements and don't offer a great deal of design satisfaction in return.*

*I happen to disagree with that. I think what these types of projects require is a lot of coordination and digging to make sure one understands the technical information that is being presented. Having grasped and assimilated that information, an architect is presented with an opportunity to find a creative way to express the client's needs, something that is done too seldom in foodservice design. And when designers choose not to express these projects creatively, they leave the job to those with lesser talents. Unfortunately, this often means foodservice facilities end up being less than interesting. And they don't need to be.*

*Foodservice facilities can and should be creative and interesting places to visit and to work in. So, when we've been involved in planning foodservice projects there are a couple of things we look to do.*

*For one, we don't hide from the technical aspects of what is being done. Some architects, I think, try to shove all that into the background and are concerned only with how they are going to dress things up, up front. We don't take that approach. We want to know what is really going on back there, how does the food move from freezer to cook top to presentation. We want to know how people are going to handle products moving through their department. What happens to packaging as it goes from storage to use to disposal? All of those things become a part of the flow of how this space is used.*

*And the more we understand how people and materials move through a transaction, in the broadest sense, the better understanding we have of that flow. And once we understand that flow or process, it almost by necessity has to find some expression in the outward architecture. It almost can't remain behind some austere front. It wants and needs to have expression of what's going on. I know this sounds esoteric, but it's true. If there's a lot going on back there (kitchen), you take the time to understand what's happening. That form can be expressed.*

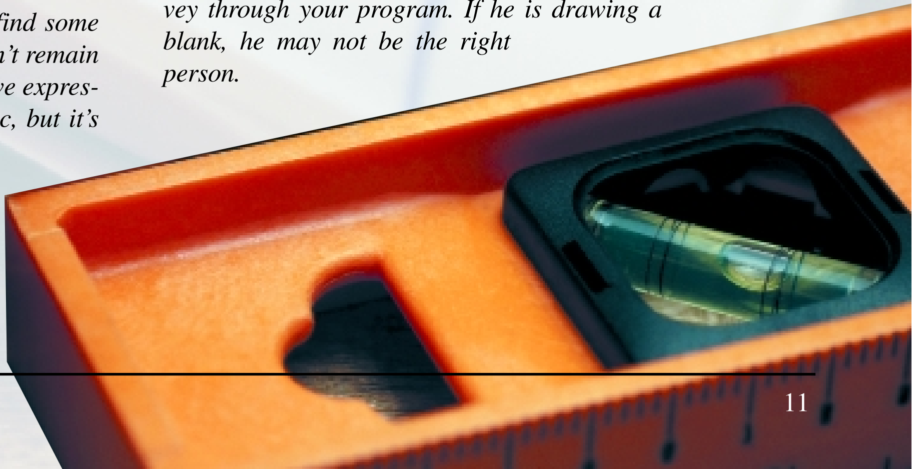
*So we, along with our consultants, would spend time making sure we understand the pieces of equipment that are going into a facility. We'd make sure we knew which connections were necessary, how much heat the equipment would be generating, what hot and cold water connections were necessary, what electrical connections were necessary, what drains had to be provided. Also, we'd take into consideration the heights, the sizes, the relationships of those pieces of equipment. And then we'd determine how the people are going to flow as those pieces move along. All of those things start to take shape and begin to define themselves into something. Maybe the whole line becomes something curvilinear or rectilinear.*

*And without being abstract, a form begins to develop. It's not abstract just on its own, but it's an expression of what's going on behind the form. And whether it ends up being a sleek counter top or a bold soffit, it can be explained and rationalized. There's a reason for it. Maybe it juts out at an acute angle because that's the way the line of equipment lays out best for the workers behind it. Functional architecture really is a beautiful thing.*

*When I accept a project like that, I'm looking not only to solve a problem but solve it creatively. To take a look at it not in terms of just answering the basic questions of how it's going to be done but I'm saying to myself, okay, how can this be done better. And I want people not to just glance at it but look at it again and again and recognize that something different was done there. Because if people stop and think about the architecture, the project is successful.*

*If you like the scenario I've described, you would, by necessity, want an architect who's curious, who shows an interest in your equipment and what's going on with it. If an architect strolls in and doesn't seem interested in knowing about that equipment, if he or she goes directly to talking about finishes and pizzazz, then you may get a showpiece that doesn't work behind the scenes. Likewise, someone who has a good nuts and bolts grasp of your equipment should know how to turn that into interesting architecture, as well. I would pick that nuts and bolts architect's brain and see if there's a spark there. If you like the flash and pizzazz architect, make sure he cares about your equipment.*

*Also, it's very important to take note of how well your architect communicates with you. It's vital you get the impression that he or she is listening to you. If you're talking about really emphasizing a certain type of delivery, whether it be a cold line or a hands-on approach, make sure your architect is listening and understanding. He or she should be looking for ways the architecture can physically convey what you're trying to convey through your program. If he is drawing a blank, he may not be the right person.*



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due to reduction of staff, preparation time, energy, and food cost would make your $216,000 project pay off in 2.2 years.

## The Renovation Timeline

**The renovation start date** is determined once the decision is made to proceed. Decide who you will hire for the architect, kitchen equipment provider, and general contractor. Meet separately with these people, discussing the contents of their proposal and fee. Remember that every price is negotiable. Low price does not always mean that each competitor is equal. Understand the price differences. Once you have selected the architect, kitchen equipment provider, and general contractor, schedule a meeting with all of them at one time to discuss the project and what questions and concerns they may have involving each party. Take minutes at the meeting. If after the meeting you decide to use each of their services, then contact them separately and schedule time to sign their contracts. Never pay for anything in full; always keep a retainer payable upon completion of the project. Always put the completion date in the contract, and if the work is not completed on the actual date, then state a dollar amount for each day the project runs over. Have pre-scheduled weekly or bi-monthly project meetings at the job site with the architect, kitchen equipment provider, and general contractor. At these meetings discuss issues and concerns along with the progress of the site. Remember to always take minutes of your scheduled meetings.

## Actual Project Costs

Provide estimate sheets for all service and equipment costs.

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|---|---|
| • Architect cost | $5,000 |
| • Kitchen consultant cost | $1,000 |
| • Kitchen equipment cost | $50,000 |
| • General contractor cost | $150,000 |
| • Misc. cost – Smallwares/disposables | $10,000 |
| Total Project Cost | $216,000 |
| $1,001,000 Savings/120 Months = | $8,341 (Monthly) |

$216,000 Cost/$8,341 Monthly Savings =
26 Months/2.2 Years

| | |
|---|---|
| Net Savings in 10 Years = | $785,000 |

## Dietary Renovation Proforma
## Actual Project Savings – 10 Years

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|---|---|
| • 2 Full-time staff 10 years | $754,000 |
| • Energy reduction – Equipment/HVAC 10 years – $500/month Break-even 5 years | $30,000 |
| • Food cost savings of 1% due to volume purchases, storage, etc. 10 years at $350,000 of annual purchases | $35,000 |
| • Preparation Savings – 5 Hours daily at $10/hour or $50/day over 10 years | $182,000 |
| Total Savings | $1,001,000 |

**The renovation completion date** is the target date for your kitchen to be operational. When the renovation is complete, schedule a walk-through with the architect, kitchen equipment provider, and general contractor. Schedule this a minimum of one week after the kitchen has been turned over to you for foodservice operation. Make a "punch list" of what details need to be done. Determine a date when the punch list should be completed. After your initial walk-through, schedule a six-month walk-through with the architect, kitchen equipment provider, and general contractor. The purpose of the six-month walk-through meeting is to examine the durability of the materials provided.

## Summing It Up

Follow these guidelines when you are considering a kitchen renovation:

- Determine short-term and long-term goals
- Develop a plan
- Present your plan in a financial manner
- Reduce labor
- Analyze pay-back to the facility
- Hire a consultant for design/layout and concept development
- Implement your plan into a one, two, or three year project
- After you make your plan, follow your plan

The reward of a kitchen renovation is cost savings to the facility and a streamlined foodservice operation. Good Luck! ■

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### More on Kitchen Renovation at the DMA Annual Meeting

Doug Fahrenholz and Rob Horace, CDM, CFPP will co-present an educational session titled "What to Consider When Renovating Foodservice Kitchens" at the DMA Annual Meeting in Reno this summer. The information-packed session will be Tuesday, July 20.